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THE WAR THROUGH  
DANISH EYES

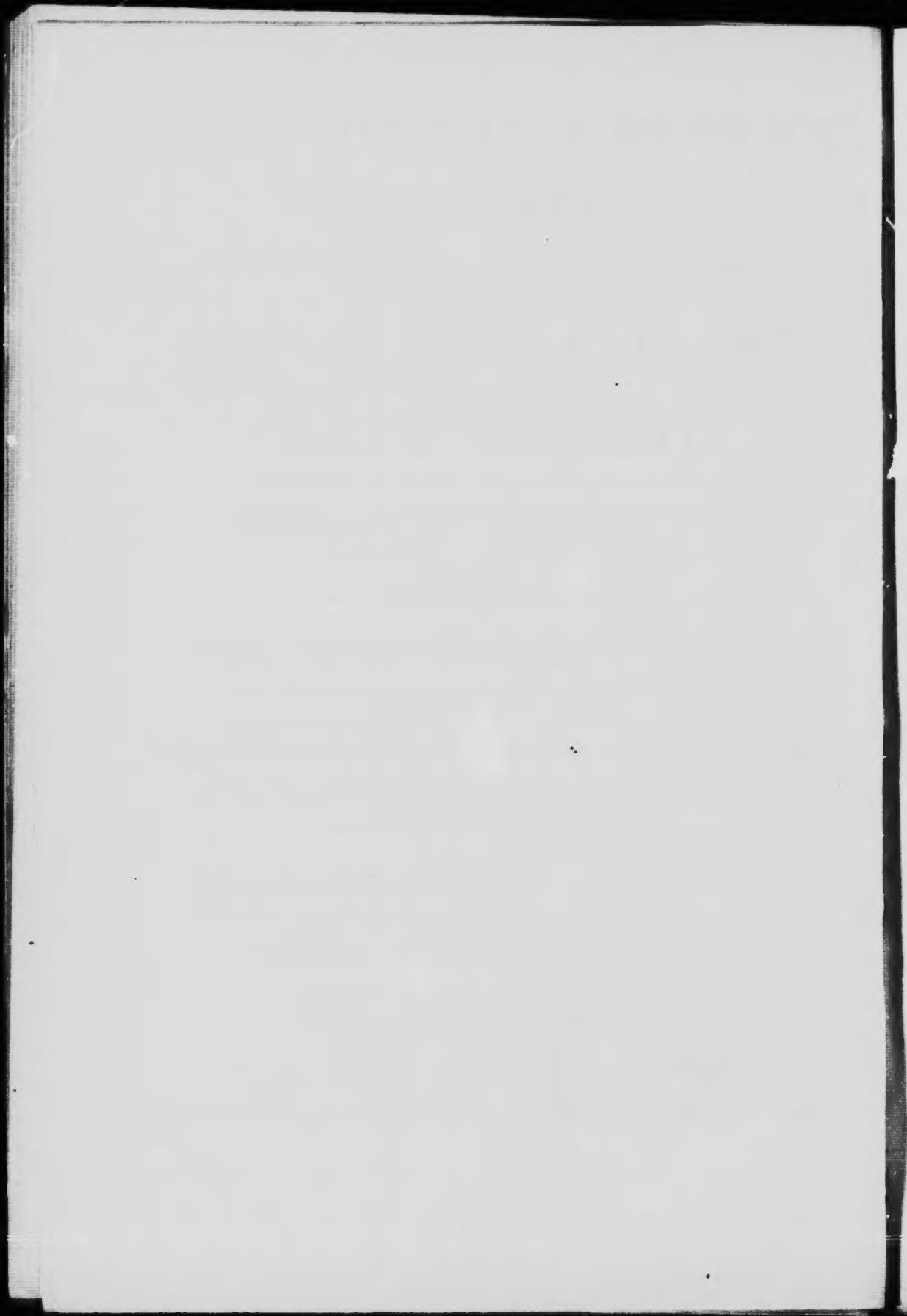
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A DANE

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## THE WAR THROUGH DANISH EYES

SINCE the outbreak of the great European War, we have now and then seen English newspapers express the opinion that the Danish public in general does not manifest its sympathy with the British cause so clearly and openly as—in their opinion—it ought to do ; sometimes we even find tokens of suspicion whether Danish sympathies do not tend to the other side, and whether German claims and German intrigue have always on the part of Denmark been met with so decided a refusal as they ought to be, according to the duty imposed by the professed strict and impartial neutrality of the Danish State.

In seeking to give an opinion on this subject, I must begin by pointing out the extreme difficulty of arriving at an absolutely impartial and general judgement about a matter which is complicated by several different and mutually incompatible facts and circumstances. In the first place, however, it is absolutely necessary to direct the reader's attention to the immense danger and difficulties arising from the mere fact of our frontiers being immediately adjacent to Germany, and especially to Prussia.

It must be very difficult for an Englishman to form a clear conception of that peculiar feeling of latent but imminent peril impressed upon Danes by the consciousness of always having the German military power

immediately outside their doors—this army of millions so admirably equipped and prepared for instant action, at any time able to invade our country within a few hours; besides this, the German fleet, enormous in comparison with ours, manœuvring near our coasts, and ever and anon trespassing on our waters in a way that would never be tolerated by Germany, if any foreign Power dared to try similar proceedings near her coasts; and added to this the dire experience of the absolutely unscrupulous use made of these forces, as soon as their masters gain the conviction that 'we must have' some provinces belonging to a neighbouring country, which sentence of Count Bismarck, pronounced with reference to the Danish duchies, was the sole and real cause of the attack on Denmark in 1864. These facts cause a feeling of despondency and helplessness which makes many Danes regard our existence as depending to a great extent upon the doubtful goodwill of Germany, and makes them above all fear any utterance or act that might in any way be disagreeable to the mighty neighbour.

Add to this a sincere admiration of everything really great in Germany—German ability, energy, and enterprise, German art and science, German progress and development during the last forty or fifty years—and the circumstance that many Danes, settled in Germany, are strongly influenced by the milieu in which they are living, often *completely imbued with the German point of view*, and constantly striving to impress this upon their correspondents at home—and it will be intelligible that a number of Danes are to be found arguing as follows :

Notwithstanding our sincere wish to remain on equally friendly terms with all our neighbours, and notwithstanding the extreme importance of our con-

nexions and trade with other States—especially with England—there is no country whose friendship is so indispensable, and whose ill-will is so detrimental, to Denmark as Germany. Germany has contributed more than any other nation to all our development ; as for trade, much of what we export goes to Germany, and by far the greatest part of our imports is brought in from her ; as for our culture, German art and science have given us many impulses, while on the other hand Danish artists, authors, and poets have found more appreciation in Germany than anywhere else. As for political relations, our very independence is at the mercy of Germany ; we have learnt in 1864 that even the guarantee of all the Great Powers could not maintain our integrity against the will of Germany ; therefore, in view of her tremendous development and our fatal decline since that time, nothing remains for us but to put all our hope and confidence in the justice and magnanimity of that great nation. Whatever may be our sympathy or antipathy, we have no choice ; the question of self-preservation dictates our line of conduct as an inevitable necessity. We must do our utmost to satisfy the claims, and avoid everything that might tend to awake the suspicion and discontent, of our powerful southern neighbour.

It is very difficult to ascertain how many there are who really accept these arguments ; there are others who denounce them as below the standard of an independent nation's self-respect ; and in spite of all the reasons which give weight to them, there are many—in my opinion by far the greater part of the Danish nation—who argue in quite a different way. I shall now try to give a summary of their views, and to make clear the foundation on which they rest.

If we desire to judge clearly, without risk of deceiving ourselves as to our real interests and situation, it is absolutely necessary to take our departure from a historical point of view. Looking at the main outlines, it

appears obvious that this war presents itself to the mind as the direct consequence of the wars of 1864, 1866, and 1870—the logical continuation (perhaps conclusion) of that era of blood and iron begun on January 16, 1864, by the Austro-Prussian ultimatum to Denmark, and continued unrelentingly to the present day. In this ultimatum the two German Powers demanded from Denmark the cancelling within two days of the new constitution of November 15, 1863, a demand which—parliament having been adjourned—could only be fulfilled by violating the constitution. There is a striking resemblance between some points of this ultimatum and of that delivered by Austria to Serbia on July 23, 1914. The striking feature in both of these pieces of diplomacy is the putting forth of claims that are absolutely irreconcilable with the constitution and other laws of the nation concerned, and the absolute refusal of sufficient time for having the said laws altered in the legal way.

When Denmark took up the war in 1864, many persons expressed the opinion that the inevitable bloodshed was 'but for a scrap of paper', and when afterwards the Danish Government with more tenacity than prudence stuck to the conviction of rescue through the intervention of England and France, this too was 'but for a scrap of paper', viz. the Treaty of London of May 8, 1852, by which the integrity of the Danish Monarchy was fixed and guaranteed by the five Great Powers besides Sweden-Norway. But in 1864—contrary to the case of Belgium in 1914—England and France did not acknowledge any separate duty to back their guarantee by military force when it was infringed by two of the other guarantors with the silent consent of the third. Denmark, left alone and disappointed, was mutilated



and Prussia acquired the excellent harbours at Kiel and Sønderborg, which in her hand have been first-rate means for creating that mighty navy which, according to Kaiser Wilhelm's hopes, is to dispute with Britannia the ruling of the waves.

From this it will be understood that it caused no surprise whatever in Denmark, when Germany, in spite of solemn obligations, invaded the neutral States of Luxembourg and Belgium ; we recognized exactly the same line of conduct which was carried on against us with so much success, and is legalized to the mind of every true German by the sentence of Count Bismarck, that 'war cancels all treaties'. Therefore we feel convinced that the same line of action will be continued just as long as the triumphal career of Prussia continues, and it is this conviction that deprives some Danes of the hope that real independence can possibly be preserved by any small neighbour of Prussia.

It may be noted here, that neither have the German cruelties on record from Belgium caused any surprise to those who have studied the details of Prussian behaviour in Denmark during the war of 1864. It must be admitted that—upon the whole—she did not often afford cause of complaint ; but it must also be borne in mind that circumstances were of a quite different nature from what they are during the present war. In the first place, the superiority of the armies invading our country was so enormous that there was not for a single moment a real danger of any decisive defeat ; in the second place, they did not meet with the least resistance on the part of the peaceful inhabitants, who on the contrary received and treated them in a way which soldiers rarely experience in an enemy's country. Nevertheless, the Prussian army did commit several deeds incompatible

with civilized warfare, and only attributable to wanton cruelty and delight in devastation. It may suffice to mention two instances.

In besieging the position at Dybbøl, which was strengthened by some entrenchments, the Prussians, in spite of their superiority both in number and armament, met with a lengthy and obstinate resistance. About a mile and a half behind the position, beyond the sound of Als and on the low coast of this island, the small town of Sønderborg is situated. It did not take any part in the defence, but had some value as shelter for part of the troops. One day Prussian shells suddenly began to rain down over the town with great violence, continuing with some pauses till the whole town was in ruins, and this was done without the least notice being given to the unhappy inhabitants, of whom a number were wounded and killed, although this cruelty could not give the assailants any advantage whatever. In another instance Prussian troops burnt down the village of Assendrup because they had been taken by surprise there, although the attack was executed by a small body of the *Danish regular army*, without the villagers having any knowledge of it or taking any part whatever in the fighting.

When an army, which even under such circumstances cannot withhold from cruelties, is exasperated by meeting unforeseen resistance, by seeing unexpected dangers accumulate, and by feeling the peril of a definite total defeat gradually increasing for itself and its country, it may well be capable of still worse deeds, such as those lately committed by the German army in Belgium.

Now the war of 1864 is not the only one which has been fought between Denmark and Germany or some part of it. During the thousand years and more of Denmark's



existence as a single and independent realm, a multiplicity of connexions may be traced between the two nations, numerous wars have been fought, and between them long periods of peace and friendly terms have existed ; but the presence of this powerful neighbour has always continued to be an imminent danger to the small country, sometimes bringing it near the verge of annihilation, yet never succeeding in totally subjugating it. However, perilous as the enmity of Germany has been, we are taught by our history that its friendship in times of peace has been still more pernicious. Its culture, its arts, its industry have penetrated Denmark by a thousand channels, not only serving to stimulate and fertilize, but also to dislodge, scatter, and destroy native industries, while numerous adventurers, spreading over the country, have to a certain extent expelled the natives from the best posts and the most lucrative business, and by introducing their own fashions and language have largely contributed to the degeneration of our original national culture and even to the deterioration of our very language.

This peaceful invasion has often created political as well as cultural dangers, affording to the native country of the immigrants many excellent pretexts for meddling with our home affairs. It is a matter of course that in proportion as Denmark has been weak and Germany powerful, the greater has been the danger caused by this interference, and it is highly aggravated by the peculiar way in which Germans look upon themselves in relation to other nations. A keen sense of patriotism and a marked pride in the greatness of his nation are innate in every good German, but by a systematic training in the schools and throughout life these laudable sentiments are overdeveloped to such a degree, that they

are converted into a disregard for all other nations, combined with a most repulsive and exaggerated overrating of themselves. To many Germans their own nation is the only one really at the top of modern culture and civilization; nay, it is God's own select people to whose grandeur all other inferior nations ought to contribute. All the Slavs are regarded as semi-barbarous people lying far behind, while the nations of Latin stock are considered as degenerate remnants of a culture from past times; and as for the non-German nations of Gothic origin like the Netherlanders and Danes, they are looked upon as misled children of the original German race that ought to be led back to true Teutonism.

These opinions are especially professed and propagated by a number of organizations, counting among their members many distinguished persons in official and university circles, some of whom act as editors of periodicals with numerous readers. Among these, two may be mentioned: <sup>1</sup>

1. 'The German Association for North Slesvig' ('Der Deutsche Verein für das Nördliche Schleswig'), with the organ *Northern Borderland* (*Nordmark*), has been formed with the aim of rooting out completely the Danish mother-tongue among the inhabitants of Slesvig, and it pursues its aim unrelaxingly and unrelentingly with all possible means at its disposal.

2. 'The Pan-German Language and Literature Association' ('Der Alldeutsche Sprach- und Schriftverein'), with the organ *Heimdall*, does not at all limit its operations to cultural objects, as the name would indicate, but aims directly at the enlargement of German territory, a fact clearly expressed by the following motto, which, written in runes, forms part of the heading of the above-named *Heimdall*: 'From

<sup>1</sup> From Dr. Gudmund Schütte: *Pan-Germanism and Denmark*.

the Skaw to the Adriatic! From Boulogne to Narva!  
From Besançon to the Black Sea!'

Although not possessed of any official character, these leagues exert a marked influence on the authorities, often pushing them on to acts of rudeness against the Danish population of Slesvig, and sometimes to interference with the home affairs of the independent Danish State. With Argus eyes they are constantly watching every manifestation of Danish life inside as well as outside the frontier; by numerous misunderstandings and misinterpretations they find acts of hostility against Germany in the most innocent proceedings of natural self-defence, and by their denunciations they are constantly working to create, and often succeeding in creating, suspicion and ill-will against Denmark throughout Germany.

These leagues, however, principally concentrate their hatred against a number of Danish associations united under the name of the 'Co-operative South-Jutlandish Associations' ('Samvirkende Sønderjydske Foreninger'). These associations are formed with the object of supporting Danish subjects of Germany in the preservation of their hereditary mother-tongue. It has been officially and clearly proved that they are not chargeable with any act of hostility against Germany, or any illegal proceedings whatever, their activity (besides the issue of printed information) consisting in keeping up a continuation-school for young people from Slesvig who desire to obtain some education beyond that afforded by the Prussian primary schools, and further to give financial support to these young people during their sojourn at this or other schools in Denmark. It may be noted that Germany—even officially—employs exactly the same procedure to assist Germans in foreign

countries (including Denmark) in the preservation of their language, without meeting with any obstacle whatever ; but the thing that is meritorious if Germans do it is a great crime in Pan-German eyes if done by Danes. In fact, the Pan-Germans have succeeded in instigating their authorities to call upon the Danish Government to take action against the 'Co-operative South-Jutlandish Associations', asking it to issue a series of prohibitions, viz. to forbid officials to be members of them or to speak at their meetings, to expel South-Jutlanders taking part in the meetings, &c., although none of these claims could be complied with without infringement of the Danish laws.

The 'Co-operative South-Jutlandish Associations' publish a monthly review called *The South-Jutlander* (*Sønderjyden*), bearing as mottoes this declaration of the first Danish members of the German Diet, Krüger and Ahlmann : 'We are Danes, we will remain Danes, we will be treated as Danes according to International Law,' and this quotation from § 5 of the Treaty of Prague, 1866 : 'The inhabitants of the northern districts of Slesvig shall be reunited to Denmark, if by a free vote they express their wish accordingly.' This last motto was the subject of an attack from the Pan-Germans through the German minister and the Danish Government, but as the latter had no means of compelling the associations to cancel their motto, these replied that the first condition would be the cancelling from the above-named *Heimdall* of the motto : 'From the Skaw to the Adriatic', &c. ; after this nothing more was heard about the matter.

Other examples might be quoted, but these will suffice to explain the uneasiness and apprehension felt by many Danes and the question which is often asked

with deep anxiety: 'If the present state of Europe subjects us to such interference on the part of Germany, how much worse will it be, when once victorious she has dictated terms of peace to all other Powers, and stands as the supreme and uncontrolled Great Power above all others, exercising her iron hegemony over all the world? May it not be feared, that even if she leaves us the name of independence, it will scarcely be more than a mere title without any real value?'

Now, if we wish to ascertain what conditions of moral and cultural life such dependence upon Germany offers to foreign nations, we need but cast a glimpse at the German yoke laid upon the Danes in South-Jutland (Slesvig). It has been frequently proved, and occasionally avowed by the German authorities themselves, that there does not exist throughout all the German Dominions a single people more cultivated, more quiet, and more obedient to the laws than these very Danes. But are they treated accordingly? Have their characteristics been respected as was promised by the King of Prussia in a proclamation of 1864?

In the law-courts the Danish language was abolished a few years after the conquest, and all the business is conducted in German, a language not understood by the population. In the churches, German was introduced and its use gradually extended whenever a few immigrated Germans, or persons dependent on the authorities, could be induced to give the impulse by petitioning for it. These proceedings were carried on even in congregations where the overwhelming majority of the members were Danish, incapable of understanding a German sermon, to such an extent that earnest people were seized with a keen apprehension of the population being alienated from the Church and even

from the Christian Faith. But the authorities were deaf to all complaints; their true reason was once given by a clergyman in an elevated position, who made the following reply: 'Certainly, it is a pity; but even if the present generation goes to ruin, what matters, if following generations are lifted up into the higher sphere of true Teutonism?' To be Germanized was so great a benefit in his eyes, that it could not be paid for too dearly. In many districts the only means by which Christian Danes could procure intelligible religious instruction was the forming of independent congregations and the building of new churches, but these proceedings were met by the authorities with all sorts of chicanery: every pretext was made use of to prevent the population from utilizing their own churches; the first was closed by the police, and legal proceedings had to be carried on for three years, before it could be opened; afterwards the use of church bells was forbidden, the validity of ministerial acts was denied, &c., &c.

What, however, violates and hurts the population most, is that the German language has been gradually introduced in the schools, in such a way that now—since 1888—[even in purely Danish districts] there are only a couple of hours weekly instruction in religion in the Danish mother-tongue;<sup>1</sup> it is made impossible to establish Danish schools and even to keep Danish teachers in the homes; in this manner the Government does all that it can to root out the language of the population. What a goal to set before itself for a people that claims to be a Christian people and a people of culture!<sup>2</sup>

Add to this that the use of the Danish language in public meetings is prohibited in all districts where both

<sup>1</sup> By Governmental circular of November 29, 1883.

<sup>2</sup> From J. Andersen: *South Jutland under Prussian Rule*.



languages are spoken, and that this harsh measure will be extended in 1928 even to all purely Danish districts.<sup>1</sup>

The way in which Germanization is carried on in the schools will be made obvious by the simple fact that Danish children are severely punished whenever they are heard making use of their own language in the playgrounds or on the premises of the schools.

It would require volumes to describe in detail all the forms in which the persecution of everything Danish is carried on, including the repression of Danish journalism, Danish literature, Danish and even Norwegian songs, or to enumerate instances of the expulsion of Danish (and Norwegian) speakers, artists and scientific men, nay even of Danish peasant labourers necessary for agricultural purposes—and all this in most cases without the slightest cause or even pretext. A single example of very recent date may be sufficient to illustrate these features of Prussian rule. A young Danish peasant was about to marry a young girl in South-Jutland, and the couple were to take possession of the small property belonging to the parents of the bride. But on the very wedding-day German officials stepped forth before the wedding ceremony took place, and presented an order for the bridegroom to leave the country immediately. And this was done in these very days when thousands of young Danes from Slesvig are faithfully fulfilling their imposed duty, fighting and bleeding—many of them giving their lives—for the sake of their subduers.

What above all things contributes to give to these German methods of ruling an aspect of menace to all those peoples, who either now or in the future are

<sup>1</sup> According to the Association Law (*Vereinsgesetz*) of April 19, 1908, § 12.

endangered by the possibility of German supremacy, is the fact of their being carried out with the very best conscience—not at all from malevolence or cruelty, but in the firm conviction that it all tends to the real and true benefit of the population concerned, Germanization being the best of all good things. If the people in question does not understand this, then it must be compelled to do so ; and assuredly the time will come when these benefits will be recognized with thankfulness. This point of view leaves but little hope of any reform of methods.

It can only be guessed at, which nations are threatened with being blessed with these benefits, but a hint as to which they are according to German assumptions may be derived from the above-quoted motto of *Heimdall*. Other hints may be found in some maps of Europe after the war, which are widely circulated throughout Germany, and sometimes exhibited in the windows of Danish booksellers. I have here copies of two of them. The first bears the title : ‘ Map of Europe as our enemies would like to make it,’ and ‘ as the German Michel is going to make it.’ On the one side Germany is divided between its present enemies, only leaving in the centre a little country smaller than Switzerland, while at the same time the Danish islands are assigned to England, Holland to Belgium, Northern Italy to France, and most of Austria-Hungary besides the greater part of the Balkan peninsula to Serbia. On the other side Germany is represented as comprising Belgium, nearly all France and a large part of Poland and Russia, while nearly all the visible rest of Russia and the bulk of the Balkan peninsula is attributed to Austria-Hungary, *Great Britain being marked as a German, and Ireland as an Austrian colony*. It is possible that this map scarcely deserves

to be taken in good earnest ; nevertheless, it aims at stimulating to the utmost point German patriotism and presumption, and by its accusation of Germany's enemies excites against them the hatred of millions of Germans who accept its exaggerations with credulity.

The other map is a little less exaggerated, leaving on the German side a kingdom of Poland as a member of the German federation, making Scotland and Ireland independent, and generously leaving Cornwall (!) as a sort of independent England, while the rest of Old England is marked as a ' German Protectorate ' (*Deutsches Schutzgebiet*).

If we consider such German aspirations, bearing in mind the peculiar appreciation of foreign nations characteristic to Germans, we must feel convinced that if Germany comes forth victorious from the terrible contest, there will be no real and true independence for any of her small neighbours in future, whatever may be the formal state of independence left to them. The fact is that to Germany (as to Austria) there are two degrees of independence: one fit for themselves, another for their small neighbours; the latter consisting in these being allowed to govern themselves, but only according to the will of the big neighbour, who reserves to himself the right of meddling with all their affairs, from the greatest vital questions to the pettiest details.

If, on the contrary, Germany is defeated, we cannot forget that her enemies have drawn their sword not only for their own sake, but quite as much for the independence of the small States and for the validity of those solemn treaties that are to be reduced by Germany to mere ' scraps of paper ', while on the contrary she herself has opened the war under the classical maxim: ' *Vae victis* '. In the history of past times, moreover, we do

not find any cause whatever for suspicion against England, France, or Russia as harbouring the least inclination towards violating our integrity or our independence. On the contrary, we often find English voices of some consequence expressing deep regret for England having suffered the mutilation of Denmark in 1864 ; and as for France, she does remember that it was on her initiative that § 5, with its promise of some relief, was put into the Treaty of Prague.

Upon the whole, we must rest every hope in the victory of the three Entente Powers, and in our inmost hearts consider them as fighting in reality for our sake quite as much as for their own.

Every intelligent reader who has studied the points of view above developed, and has examined the recorded facts with impartiality, will certainly admit that the situation of the Danish people is a most difficult one, and will understand that the greater part of the people found its own thoughts expressed by the following proclamation, issued by the King and posted up at all street corners and on all hoardings on the first of August.

‘ In the serious circumstances created for our native country by the portentous occurrences of these last days, we feel impelled to make the following announcement to our people :

‘ Never was the sense of responsibility more necessary both for individuals and for the nation as a whole.

‘ Our country stands in friendly relations with all nations. We feel fully assured that the strict and impartial neutrality which has always been maintained as the foreign policy of our country, and which will now be followed unwaveringly, will be respected by all.

‘ As this is the view common to the Government and to all responsible and prudent men, we rely upon the

dignity and tranquillity, so indispensable for creating confidence in the attitude of our country, not being broken by any untimely utterance of feeling, inconsiderate demonstration, or similar action. Every one now has his responsibility and his duty. We feel convinced that the seriousness of this hour will set its stamp upon the actions of all Danish men and women.

‘God save our country.’

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